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THE OPPORTUNITY OF THE MUGWUMP.

Mugwump long since ceased to be a term of reproach, and is not used as such with any sincerity by even the densest and most stupid partisans, in whom it invariably inspires the respect born of fear.—*New York Times*.

If the statement quoted above be a true one—and there are few observant people who will deny its truth—it naturally opens up some interesting and suggestive reflections. Ten years is not a very extended period in the history of a nation, or of an idea, or of a word, but the last ten years have brought many important changes to the nation that calls itself the United States of America, to the idea of individual independence in politics, and lastly, to the word Mugwump. Ten years ago, the hold of the great party that had fought out the battle with slavery had not been successfully broken, in spite of its want of sound political principles and the equally manifest corruption of its most conspicuous leaders. Ten years ago, it was an open question in the North and West how many men of intelligence and social standing would dare to act upon their convictions and vote against the party of their allegiance, the party of wealth and social prestige, because they believed that the historic name of that party was no longer synonymous with sound political principles and honest political leaders. Ten years ago in the South, it was not even a question whether a man could vote against the powerful party that represented his color and caste, without incurring social degradation or committing political suicide. In other words, real political inde-

pendence on the part of the individual was a decade ago an uncertain quantity to the north of Mason and Dixon's line, and an unknown quantity to the south of it. Ten years ago, finally, the term Mugwump, which to-day characterizes politically a large and growing number of our ablest and most patriotic citizens, was a term of contempt and reproach, which, if not just invented, nevertheless required explanation whenever and wherever it was applied.

Of course, the changes that have come to the nation, the idea, and the word are, to use a favorite expression of Shelley's, intimately "interpenetrated." The Indian word for chief, or leader, with its modern gloss, "too-big-for-his-breeches," would never have been drawn from the shades of Loco Foco politics in New York to become a formidable weapon in the hands of orators and editors, had not a great political party been tottering to its fall. The word would never have lost its content of bitter reproach and come practically to mean Independent had not two great parties learned from their wavering fortunes, that it connoted qualities uniting a body of men who held, or might soon hold, the balance of power. Then, too, the word could never have acquired a respectable, not to say an important significance, had not the idea of political independence on the part of the individual been steadily gaining ground, which, on the other hand, would never have come about had not the old political parties been steadily losing ground.

Are we to infer, then, that history will repeat itself, and that just as the contemptuous nicknames Whig, and Tory, and Methodist, have come to have an honorable and permanent significance, so Mugwump will one day become the recognized name of an honorable and permanent party? By no means, if the word retains any portion of the meaning it has to-day, for partyless men cannot make a party. If the Mugwumps of this country ever form a new party, or incorporate themselves firmly in an old party, (as some of them seem to have done,) they must logically give up their aboriginal designation, even though no process of law may

exist to compel them to do so. This, then, is not the Opportunity of the Mugwump. The consistent Methodist may become a Bishop of his chosen religious body, but the consistent Mugwump is the only native born citizen who can never by any possibility become President of these United States.

Yet the man who may not be king may sometimes be king-maker, which is not a rôle to be despised, even if historians have of late been stripping the figure of Warwick of some of its romance. This is not saying that the Mugwump must cease to be a "good American" and must bend his energies toward the overthrow of our republican institutions and the establishment of a monarchy with Grover Cleveland for king. It is not even saying that the Mugwump must throw in his lot with the small body of amiable doctrinaires who are endeavoring to persuade us to modify our form of government by adopting the principle of ministerial responsibility. It is simply saying, in figurative language, that the Mugwump, though he may not attain to important political station, may nevertheless render his country important political services. This is the Mugwump's Opportunity, and it is the purpose of this paper to outline the direction these services may reasonably be expected to take, in view of the political changes of the past decade and the increased political independence that has resulted therefrom. But the necessity, not to say the usefulness, of the Mugwump's existence has been so strenuously denied that a few words must first be devoted to showing that he does not cumber the ground.

The chief objection that has been brought against the creed and position of the Mugwump is summed up in the claim of many honest and thoughtful people that in modern times, at least, and in constitutionally governed nations, a man cannot do his political duty outside of a political party. They are inclined to translate the famous dictum of Aristotle as though it ran, "man is by nature a party animal." There is, of course, much truth in their contention. There were parties among the Greeks under Agamemnon, there

were parties among the Greeks under Pericles, there were parties among the Greeks under the successors of Constantine, even though the subject dividing them was no more important than the color worn by a charioteer. Men will divide into parties everywhere and always, and, when the people are allowed a voice in the government, they will divide into political parties. Furthermore, it will be found that men normally tend to divide themselves into two parties, one looking to the future and one looking to the past. When a third party emerges, it usually looks to the present or the immediate future and does not break hopelessly with the immediate past—hence it draws from the two normal parties. It may succeed nominally in ousting one of these normal parties; but change of name does not necessarily imply change of nature and the rule of two parties, conservative and progressive, remains unbroken. It is obvious enough that these two parties, or at times three parties, practically divide the field of political action between them, and that a man who belongs to neither or none of them is like a lordless man in the Middle Ages, or—what, perhaps, better expresses his littleness—a grain of wheat between two millstones. Yet the typical Mugwump is a partyless man, whose vote will indeed be sought by parties, but whose counsel goes for naught with them, and to whom they will never willingly pay homage. Can he be certain, then, that by holding aloof from all party organizations, he is not voluntarily giving up his opportunities for directing the political energies of his compatriots in proper directions, that he is not preparing for himself the moral and intellectual dry-rot that so surely creeps over all men who lose touch with humanity? Many observers answer this question in the affirmative.

But the Mugwump has not been slow to reply that there is something specious about this objection to his conduct and position. He points out that all important party changes have been produced through the instrumentality of men who were Mugwumps, in fact, although not in name or on princi-

ple. It is not the nature or habit of thoughtful men to change sides violently—to flop, as the saying is—from one party to another. If it were not for the fact that there are always men who balance political questions too evenly to become pronounced partisans, as well as men who will withdraw their allegiance from a leader and a cause proved to them to be false, the momentum acquired by a successful party would, through a well known human weakness, rivet that party's hold upon a country for an indefinite period. That parties rarely retain their hold for a generation, that they are frequently rechristened, if not reborn, that they would work infinite harm to a people if they did not lose their hold and sometimes their very names, are facts which serve to show that the Independent has always had his place in politics, and that it has been an important and useful place. Nor is it merely a matter of the Mugwump's change of vote, or his abstention from voting. Perhaps his chief influence is to be found in his likeness to the rats that desert a building about to fall. Hence he has sometimes been designated by the offensive appellation, a ratter. His indecision, his tendency to balance the claims of rival parties have more influence upon the mass of voters than a violent change of front could possibly have. Doubt and hesitation are sapping forces, more destructive to party supremacy than any offensive weapon in the armory of an organized opposition. It is true that doubt and hesitation are repugnant to most men—that they prefer open and hard fighting; but it is also true that entrenched power is often able to beat back open and hard fighters for a very long time. If, now, it be conceded that there is such a phenomenon as the momentum of political success, that this momentum carries parties to the extremes of political action or reaction, that therefore a change of party front or a change of parties is necessary at times for the welfare, or even for the continuance of the state, it seems clear that the permanent existence of a body of citizens who are never partisans, and of a smaller body, who are avowed Mugwumps or Independents, is not only

beneficial, but also positively necessary to any non-despotic state.

The case may be summed up, then, as follows: organized parties are always necessary for progressive popular government; but these parties must be held in check, or else made to give place to one another, through the steady influence or concerted action of more or less small, unorganized, and temporary groups composed of non-partisans by temperament and Independents on principle. It is now in order to point out what line of action may be expected from the American Mugwump in the present political crisis.

That there is a political crisis few will be bold enough to deny. A party swept into power by the combined efforts of its own members and of a large body of disaffected voters of the opposing party, disgusted with its record on the matter of Protection, has just failed, through inability to control a few of its own leaders, to furnish the voters who supported it with a just measure of relief from the oppressive legislation against which they so vigorously protested. This same party not twelve months since gave another proof of its unwieldiness in its groping and uncertain method of dealing with a financial crisis, for which, however, it was not responsible. The main question now confronting the voters of the United States is—shall this party be continued in power? The prevailing impression seems to be that the voters will answer this question in the negative and that the chief of the two parties at present in opposition will be returned to power. This will simply mean that a number of anti-Protectionists sufficient to turn the scales of election will be so disgusted by their failure to obtain adequate redress that they will consent to the return to power of a party pledged to Protection in order to teach the party pledged to overthrow Protection a well deserved lesson. It is idle to deny that a change of parties will mean this and nothing but this. Personal reasons may influence a few voters, silver may influence a few others, class

grievances may swell the vote of a third party, prohibitionists and other "ists" will cut their familiar antics, but the great mass of the American people will vote in the next national election to continue the war upon Protection or to suspend it. If they do not so vote, it will be a sign that the political common sense, not to say sagacity, which has always been held to be characteristic of the people of this country, is waning and in a fair way to become extinct. For he who runs may read that Protection is the Golden Calf of this nation, between which and the true God a choice must be made. And it is furthermore obvious to any thinking man that the choice is not between high tariff and low tariff, but between Protection and Free Trade. There is no logical halting place in Tariff Reform except for the man to whom logic is an empty name, and to whom compromise in matters of principle presents no insuperable difficulty. Unfortunately, the history of this country proves that compromise in matters of principle is never repugnant to an important contingent of our politicians and voters. Hence, it is that our political struggles are long and desperate; but, as in the case of slavery, logic always prevails, and so the Protectionist and the Tariff Reformer will both go.

What now will the Mugwump do? As Mugwump, he is not committed to either side in the matter of Protection, but as an honest citizen, willing and anxious to serve his country, he is committed practically. A Mugwump who believed Protection to be honest, justifiable, or even temporarily expedient, would be a *lusus naturæ*. The light that was in him would be darkness—he would not deserve to be counted among the tribes of thinking men. The Mugwump must be an anti-Protectionist, for that means an anti-corruptionist, but he need not necessarily cast his vote for any special party. It is open to him to believe that he can do his best work by voting with the party now favoring Protection in order that he may obtain a point of vantage from which he can induce its leaders to take the step Sir Robert Peel took during the Corn-Law agitation. He may

on the other hand hold that the party pledged to the belief that Protection is wrong and unconstitutional (in that it is wrong *per se*) deserves another trial and may give it his support. Or he may believe that it is his duty to vote with a third party already in existence, or to help to form a new party, or to abstain from voting entirely. But whatever he believes on these points, one thing is clear. The history of elections in the last decade shows that he and the voters he influences temporarily, hold the balance of power. If he be not committed to any particular course of action, he is committed to careful thought and bold utterance upon the situation. He is not bound to defend the present tariff-bill as the party men that passed it are. He can make it plain, if he be a strong and brave man, that his future support of the party now in power does not involve any approbation of that party's recent course. He can make it plain that his support of the chief party in opposition is intended as a rebuke to a party that has failed to keep its pledges or intended to serve as an entering wedge for the policy of anti-Protection in the party now committed to Protection. But whatever he does should be done openly and boldly. Within the next two years, thousands, nay millions of American citizens will weigh Protection in the balance and will find it wanting. But so great will be or should be their distrust of the two chief parties that they will be uncertain how to act. To whom will they turn more promptly for guidance than to the consistent Mugwump—to the man held by no political tie save devotion to his country's interest? Here, then, is the Mugwump's Opportunity. He can station himself at the dividing roads and point out the true way to them asking a sign. But how can a centrifugal atom serve as a guide post? Pushed to its last analysis, independence in politics seems to mean chaos. The Mugwump's Opportunity appears to be an ironical substitute for the Mugwump's Dilemma.

But is anything ever pushed to its last analysis in this world of ours? Certainly the idea of independence in poli-

tics has not been so resolved. We cannot even imagine perfect political independence. The man who embodied it would be a fit denizen for some other planet. Mugwumps may not form parties, but they take their cue from leaders, and it is time for these leaders to speak out plainly. As their leaders speak and act, so will the mass of the Mugwumps, and so will a majority of the undecided voters.

How, now, are the leaders to give the desired cue to their followers? If a fifth of the Mugwumps follow each of the five courses of action indicated above as possible, the Opportunity of the Mugwump will have been but as "the baseless fabric of a vision." Shall the leaders hold a caucus? Ask rather shall a hard-shell Baptist don ecclesiastical vestments and preach in St. Paul's. No; far be the caucus and other machine methods from the Mugwump leaders—just as far as contracts for government printing. Bold and vigorous speeches, in public and in private, on the platform, in the street, at the club, free and untrammelled use of the independent press—these are sufficient and proper channels of influence. Through these the Mugwump leaders can easily give the cue to their followers and prevent the dissipation of the Mugwump power. It seems to the present writer that this power will, for many reasons, run less risk of dissipation if the party now in office be given another trial. It will certainly be largely dissipated if the Mugwumps abstain from voting altogether. But these are side issues.

Here, then, is the Mugwump's Opportunity, and a real one. Let him, if he be a leader, speak and act boldly; let him, if he be a follower, take his cue and speak and act boldly; let him throw his weight where it will most tell; and, finally let him leave the result with the American people, who, at the bottom of their hearts, desire the true and the right, and who are fast coming to see that Protection is the false and the wrong thing, that has for our generation taken slavery's place as the source of "woes unnumbered."

X. Y. Z.